

ASSEMBLY, No. 158

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2020 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman HAROLD "HAL" J. WIRTHS

District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Assemblyman PARKER SPACE

District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

Assemblywoman BETTYLOU DECROCE

District 26 (Essex, Morris and Passaic)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Peters and Assemblywoman Dunn

SYNOPSIS

Provides for direct property tax relief from Highlands Property Tax Stabilization Fund.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/16/2020)

1 AN ACT concerning the Highlands Municipal Property Tax
2 Stabilization program, and amending P.L.2004, c.120.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

6
7 1. Section 21 of P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-19) is amended to
8 read as follows:

9 21. a. There is created in the Department of the Treasury a
10 special non-lapsing fund to be known as the "Highlands Protection
11 Fund." The monies in the fund are dedicated and shall be used only
12 to carry out the purposes enumerated in subsection b. of this
13 section. The fund shall be credited with all revenues collected and
14 deposited in the fund pursuant to section 4 of P.L.1968, c.49
15 (C.46:15-8), all interest and other income received from the
16 investment of monies in the fund, and any monies which, from time
17 to time, may otherwise become available for the purposes of the
18 fund. Pending the use thereof pursuant to the provisions of
19 subsection b. of this section, the monies deposited in the fund shall
20 be held in interest-bearing accounts in public depositories, as
21 defined pursuant to section 1 of P.L.1970, c.236 (C.17:9-41), and
22 may be invested or reinvested in such securities as are approved by
23 the State Treasurer. Interest or other income earned on monies
24 deposited into the fund shall be credited to the fund for use as set
25 forth in subsection b. of this section for other monies in the fund.

26 b. Monies deposited in the "Highlands Protection Fund" shall
27 be used only for:

28 (1) payments to the "Highlands **[Municipal]** Property Tax
29 Stabilization Fund" established pursuant to subsection b. of section
30 19 of **[this act]** P.L.2004, c.120 (C.54:1-85) in such amounts as are
31 necessary to provide property tax stabilization aid pursuant to that
32 section;

33 (2) payments of watershed moratorium offset aid pursuant to
34 section 1 of P.L.1999, c. 225 (C.58:29-8);

35 (3) the making of grants by the Highlands Water Protection and
36 Planning Council pursuant to sections 13 and 18 of **[this act]**
37 P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-13 and C.13:20-18) ; and

38 (4) allocations to the Pinelands Property Tax Assistance Fund
39 established pursuant to section 20 of **[this act]** P.L.2004, c.120
40 (C.54:1-84).

41 (cf: P.L.2004, c.120, s.21)

42
43 2. Section 19 of P.L.2004, c.120 (C.54:1-85) is amended to
44 read as follows:

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **[thus]** in the above bill is
not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

1 19. a. (1) There is established in the Department of the
2 Treasury the "Highlands **【Municipal】** Property Tax Stabilization
3 Board," which shall consist of three members to be appointed by the
4 Governor, who shall be recognized experts in the field of taxation.
5 Members of the board may also be members of the Highlands Water
6 Protection and Planning Council established pursuant to section 4 of
7 P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-4).

8 (2) Within 120 days after the date of enactment of P.L.2004,
9 c.120 (C.13:20-1 et al.), the board, in consultation with the
10 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council, shall establish
11 procedures for determining the valuation base of a qualified
12 municipality, whether fiscal stress has been caused by the
13 implementation of the "Highlands Water Protection and Planning
14 Act," P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-1 et al.) in a qualified municipality,
15 and the amount due a qualified municipality to compensate for a
16 decline in the aggregate true value of vacant land directly
17 attributable to the implementation of the "Highlands Water
18 Protection and Planning Act."

19 b. The "Highlands **【Municipal】** Property Tax Stabilization
20 Fund" is established in the General Fund as a special nonlapsing
21 fund for the purpose of providing State aid to property taxpayers in
22 qualified municipalities pursuant to this section. There shall be
23 credited each State fiscal year from the "Highlands Protection
24 Fund" created pursuant to section 21 of P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-
25 19) to the Highlands **【Municipal】** Property Tax Stabilization Fund
26 such sums as shall be necessary to provide State aid to reduce
27 property taxes to residents in qualified municipalities pursuant to
28 this section. Every qualified municipality shall be eligible for a
29 distribution from the fund pursuant to the provisions of this section.

30 c. The assessor of every qualified municipality shall certify to
31 the county tax board on a form to be prescribed by the Director of
32 the Division of Taxation in the Department of the Treasury, and on
33 or before December 1 annually, a report of the assessed value of
34 each parcel of vacant land in the base year and the change in the
35 assessed value of each such parcel in the current tax year
36 attributable to successful appeals of assessed values of vacant land
37 to the county tax board pursuant to R.S.54:3-21 et seq. or
38 attributable to a revaluation approved by the director and
39 implemented or a reassessment approved by the county tax board
40 **【of taxation】**. If a judgment or an appeal is overturned or modified,
41 upon a final judgment an appropriate adjustment shall be made by
42 the director in the payment of the entitlement due next following
43 the judgment.

44 d. (1) Upon receipt of reports filed pursuant to subsection c. of
45 this section and using procedures developed by the board pursuant
46 to subsection a. of this section, the county tax board shall compute
47 and certify to the director on or before December 20 of each year, in
48 such manner as to identify for each qualified municipality the

1 aggregate decline, if any, in the true value of vacant land,
2 comparing the current tax year to the base year. The aggregate
3 changes so identified for each qualified municipality shall constitute
4 its valuation base for purposes of this section.

5 (2) The Director of the Division of Taxation shall, on or before
6 January 10 of each year, provide the board with all relevant
7 information collected pursuant to the provisions of this section and
8 any other information deemed necessary by the board to determine
9 the valuation base.

10 (3) Upon receipt of the information, the board shall make a final
11 determination on the valuation base of each qualified municipality;
12 calculate the amount due to compensate property taxpayers in a
13 qualified municipality, in accordance with the procedures developed
14 pursuant to subsection a. of this section, **【to compensate】** for a
15 decline, if any, by multiplying its valuation base by its tax rate; and
16 certify to the director and the State Treasurer, on or before February
17 1 of each year, that amount to which each qualified municipality is
18 entitled.

19 e. Upon receipt of the certification by the board, the State
20 Treasurer shall certify to each qualified municipality, on or before
21 February 15, its property tax stabilization amount for the purposes
22 of subsection f. of this section. A copy of the certified amounts
23 shall be forwarded to the Director of the Division of Local
24 Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs.

25 f. (1) **【The State Treasurer, upon warrant of the Director of the**
26 **Division of Budget and Accounting in the Department of the**
27 **Treasury, shall pay to each qualified municipality its entitlement as**
28 **State aid from the sums available in the "Highlands Municipal**
29 **Property Tax Stabilization Fund" in two equal installments pursuant**
30 **to a schedule prescribed by the Division of Local Government**
31 **Services.】** A Highlands Property Tax Stabilization Credit, paid
32 from the sums available in the "Highlands Property Tax
33 Stabilization Fund," shall be applied to each real property line item
34 each year as follows:

35 (a) The Director of the Division of Taxation and the State
36 Treasurer shall certify to each county tax board, the Director of the
37 Division of Budget and Accounting, the Legislative Budget and
38 Finance Officer, and the Senate President and the Speaker of the
39 General Assembly, by May 1 of each year, the amount of Highlands
40 Property Tax Stabilization Aid due to each county and taxing
41 district for that tax year.

42 (b) When the table of aggregates prepared pursuant to R.S.54:4-
43 52 for each municipality is prepared, a tax credit rate shall be
44 calculated using the calculation of total Highlands Property Tax
45 Stabilization Aid divided by the total taxable value of all property.

46 (c) The tax credit rate shall be multiplied by the taxable value
47 for each taxable line item, the product of which shall be deducted
48 from the total taxes due, before deductions, on each line item for the

1 tax year. The tax credit rate and amount of the Highlands Property
2 Tax Stabilization Credit shall be displayed on the tax bill.

3 (d) In the event that the tax credit rate is less than \$0.005 per
4 \$100 of taxable value, the municipal chief financial officer shall
5 reserve the funds until such time as the addition of subsequent tax
6 credits exceed that threshold.

7 (e) The State Treasurer also shall reimburse each qualified
8 municipality and county tax board from the sums available in the
9 "Highlands Property Tax Stabilization Fund" for any costs,
10 including but not limited to attorney fees and personnel costs,
11 incurred in conducting reassessments and revaluations, and in
12 processing, administering, and defending successful and
13 unsuccessful appeals of assessed values for vacant land in
14 accordance with this section.

15 (2) If the amount available in the "Highlands **【Municipal】**
16 Property Tax Stabilization Fund" in any year is insufficient to pay
17 the full amount **【to which each qualified municipality is entitled】**
18 due pursuant to this **【section】** subsection, the payments shall be
19 made on a pro rata basis.

20 (3) **【Notwithstanding any provisions of this section to the**
21 **contrary, in the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth years of the**
22 **State aid program created by this section, a qualified municipality**
23 **shall be entitled to receive, respectively, 90%, 70%, 50%, 30%, and**
24 **10% of the sum it otherwise would have been paid pursuant to this**
25 **subsection, and thereafter the program shall expire.】** (Deleted by
26 amendment, P.L. , c.) (pending before the Legislature as this
27 bill).

28 g. Any municipality receiving a certification from the State
29 Treasurer pursuant to subsection e. of this section shall anticipate
30 such sums in its annual budget or any amendments or supplements
31 thereto as a direct offset to the amount to be raised by taxation.

32 h. The Director of the Division of Taxation in reviewing the
33 reports filed pursuant to subsection c. of this section may make such
34 changes therein as the director deems necessary to ensure that the
35 reports accurately reflect the change in the assessed value of vacant
36 land.

37 i. The Director of the Division of Local Government Services
38 shall make such changes in the budget of any qualified municipality
39 to ensure that all sums received pursuant to this section are utilized
40 as a direct offset to the amount to be raised by taxation and shall
41 make such changes therein as the director deems necessary to
42 ensure that the offset occurs.

43 j. Any sum received by a qualified municipality pursuant to
44 this section shall not be considered as an exception or exemption
45 under P.L.1976, c.68 (C.40A:4-45.1 et seq.).

46 k. Notwithstanding the provisions of the "Local Budget Law"
47 (N.J.S.40A:4-1 et seq.), a qualified municipality which is due a

1 property tax stabilization payment pursuant to this section may
2 anticipate the amount of the entitlement in its annual budget for the
3 year in which the payment is made.

4 l. The State Treasurer may deduct from the State aid a
5 municipality would otherwise receive pursuant to this section an
6 amount equivalent to that portion of any sums received by a
7 municipality pursuant to section 1 of P.L.1999, c.225 (C.58:29-8)
8 that the State Treasurer, in consultation with the Director of the
9 Division of Local Government Services, determines to be
10 duplicative of any State aid received pursuant to this section.

11 m. The Director of the Division of Taxation and the Director of
12 the Division of Local Government Services shall each adopt,
13 pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410
14 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), such rules and regulations as may be
15 necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

16 n. As used in this section:

17 "Base year" means the calendar year 2003;

18 "Board" means the Highlands **【Municipal】** Property Tax
19 Stabilization Board established pursuant to subsection a. of this
20 section;

21 "County tax board" means a county board of taxation;

22 "Current tax year" means the most recent year for which a report
23 is filed pursuant to subsection c. of this section;

24 "Highlands preservation area" means the preservation area of the
25 Highlands Region designated by subsection b. of section 7 of
26 P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-7);

27 "Qualified municipality" means any municipality located wholly
28 or partially in the Highlands preservation area **【**, provided however,
29 that after the adoption of the Highlands regional master plan by the
30 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council pursuant to
31 section 8 of P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-8), qualified municipality
32 shall mean only a municipality that has conformed its municipal
33 master plan and development regulations to the Highlands regional
34 master plan pursuant to section 14 of P.L.2004, c.120 (C.13:20-
35 14)**】**;

36 "Tax rate" means that portion of the effective property tax rate
37 for the current tax year which reflects local taxes to be raised for
38 district school purposes and local municipal purposes, calculated by
39 dividing the total of column 12, section C by net valuation on which
40 county taxes are apportioned in column 11, both as reflected in the
41 Abstract of Ratables for the current tax year, and expressed as a rate
42 per \$100 of true value;

43 "True value of vacant land" or "true value" means the aggregate
44 assessed value of vacant land divided by the average ratio of
45 assessed-to-true value of real property (commonly known as the
46 equalization rate) promulgated by the Director of the Division of
47 Taxation in the Department of the Treasury and published in the
48 table of equalized valuation; and

1 "Valuation base" means the change in the aggregate true value of
2 vacant land directly attributable to the implementation of the
3 "Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act," P.L.2004, c.120
4 (C.13:20-1 et al.) in a qualified municipality when comparing the
5 current tax year to the base year.

6 o. **【**This section shall expire July 1 next following one year
7 after the date the last State aid payment is made to a qualified
8 municipality in the tenth year as provided pursuant to paragraph (3)
9 of subsection f. of this section.**】** (Deleted by amendment,
10 P.L. , c.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

11 (cf: P.L.2004, c.120, s.19)

12
13 3. This act shall take effect immediately.
14
15

16 STATEMENT

17
18 This bill would revise the Highlands Property Tax Stabilization
19 Program to require that the distribution of the stabilization aid
20 reflect all elements of the property tax bill. The bill would provide
21 that the tax credit rate shall be multiplied by the taxable value for
22 each taxable line item, the product of which shall be deducted from
23 the total taxes due, before deductions, on each line item for the tax
24 year. The tax credit rate and amount of the Highlands Property Tax
25 Stabilization Credit would be displayed on the tax bill.